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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the role of part-time college faculty in higher education, the job market for prospective faculty, the role of unions in organizing part-time faculty, and possible solutions to the over-reliance on and exploitation of part-time faculty and teaching assistants by American universities. It discusses one part-time faculty member's experiences with academic unionism, focusing on the need for full-time faculty to support the efforts of part-time faculty for higher wages and benefits. The paper examines the growing trend toward part-time and temporary positions in academia and in the national economy as a whole. It examines the challenges inherent in organizing part-time and temporary faculty, and research on the growing use of part-time and temporary faculty. The paper argues that all college faculty need to organize to raise the pay and benefits of part-time and temporary faculty to the point that they are priced out of the market. That is, so it will become cheaper (instead of more costly) to fill full-time, tenure track positions instead of part-time and temporary openings. Contains seven references. (MDM)

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PART-TIME FACULTY CHAPTER

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CENTRAL CONTINGENCIES: PART-TIME FACULTY AND THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

A Conference for Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty

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It is exciting and encouraging to see so many people come together to discuss problems that have simply worried some of us for the longest time. There even seems to be a positive trend developing in this regard. "Part-time faculty" was also the main topic at a statewide conference in New Jersey where I spoke last week. Unlike that meeting, today's events, crucially focus on "Academic Unionism" as well, putting the spotlight on vehicles for change. The organizers of this conference deserve our thanks.

I am particularly gratified about this focus on unionism because I just read a distressingly individualistic account of the problems of part-time teaching in one of CUNY's own journals: Concerns.[1] This article, which incidently attacked the Rutgers' Writing Program where I teach, put forth page after page of scattered "coping strategies" for the adjuncts whose performance the author finds predictibly lacking. She falls into the same trap that we frequently see in the national media: pitying part-timers for their plight and blaming them for larger problems. Her conclusion inexplicably reversed everything, however. Seeing the inadequacy of all her suggestions, the author speculates that "the answer ... may rest with an adjunct union ... and ... with the profession as a whole." And so she confirmed two things for me. One is the essay writing pedagoguey we use at Rutgers: this author's paper is a good basis for revision; she discovered her thesis when she got to the end. But more relevant for today, the author confirmed that the emphases of this meeting "Academic Unionism and Part-Time Faculty: A Conference for Full-Time and Part-Time Faculty" are right on target.

My own experience with academic unionism came right out of the concrete expression of my problems as a part-time lecturer at Rutgers. Having taught two or three courses a semester for six years, I found myself not reappointed one year. No one said anything to me or wrote me a letter explaining why. When I inquired, there didn't seem to be much of a reason and the following Fall I did get an assignment, but in the meantime a colleague referred me to the faculty union at Rutgers. The AAUP didn't represent part-timers at the time, but enough full-time faculty active in the AAUP were interested to encourage and support the beginning of an organizing drive. With a committee of a dozen enthusiasts, I spent the next three years methodically building a communication network and preparing for a representation election. The election, in July of 1988, was overwhelmingly successful, with 80% voting for the AAUP. At the time I remember feeling the problems were insurmountable. Now, I look back and think "That was the easy part."

Negotiating a contract is where the fun begins. That's where real change can be proposed and implemented, and so that's where administrators dig in their heels (and there's never a shortage of heels.) We learned a number of important lessons through negotiations. First, we learned that part-timers can't make gains by themselves. Without the support of full-time faculty, student organizations and staff unions, we might have never reached an agreement with the university at all. Our statewide coalition worked to educate both campus and community in the mysteries of budget trade-offs, divide and conquer

strategies, and administrative bloat. We showed in a variety of ways that salary increases didn't have to come from tuition hikes. Of course, in the process, these groups themselves learned the ways in which part-time faculty are exploited and that we exist. Students were shocked to discover the conditions under which part-timers work and that many of their most admired teachers were part-timers.

On the other hand, we learned the value of an independent voice. At Rutgers, part-time faculty were forced by the administration into a separate bargaining unit. That means we do our own negotiations and grievances with no direct assistance from the full-time faculty. This means we have to work very hard, but it also means we make our own decisions. We decide the top priority at the bargaining table. We can seek advice, of course, from full-timers and we share office space, etc. through a service bureau, but our public statements and policy decisions are our own. This may sound particularly inviting to some of you here at CUNY where the difficulties of a large joint unit are festering. But keep in mind that the independent workload is enormous and our unit is necessarily small and more vulnerable. The optimum situation would probably be a joint unit with clear strong voices thriving within it.

The third thing we learned was compromise as a step to real change. Our first contract is far from a model, but it does start the negotiating cycle and it includes basics like salary minimums, annual increases, and compensation for oversize classes. Security remains the touchiest issue: anything remotely suggesting a more permanent or respectable connection to the

university was contemptuously opposed by the administration. But the contract is something on which to build and this summer the bargaining process begins again. We will see where this second round leads us in these tough times of economic crisis and restructuring of higher education.

Now if we are going to look at issues of economic crisis and restructuring of higher education, then we need to also consider the situation of teaching assistants, which is quite parallel to that of part-time faculty. Although TAs are perhaps in a more confused situation, being both exploited as employees, and misled as future members of the profession.

The startling image of a doctoral graduate in cap and gown wearing a sign proclaiming "WILL WORK FOR FOOD" accompanied a recent article in The Chronicle of Higher Education. [2] The authors don't actually say that Phd's are as unemployed as steelworkers, but they might as well with 1000 applicants for every advertised position. They neatly outline the ethical problem in an economic context, recognizing that "the collapse of the job market makes the logic of graduate apprenticeship morally corrupt." They make a number of admirable recommendations, including one to "reduce the number of students [graduate programs] admit" and another to "lessen exploitation of graduate students" and "increase their wages and benefits." I was struck by the similarity between these recommendations and those that frequently arise regarding part-time faculty.

Such statements generally recommend limiting the use of adjunct positions and addressing their lack of compensation and

professional treatment. But what's not particularly emphasized in any of these policy statements is the way in which part-time faculty and graduate teaching assistants function as reserve labor forces. This is a point I find myself coming back to again and again.

Not only do part-timers and TAs both supply reserve labor, but they actually constitute the same pool, with individuals moving back and forth between the two groups and often simultaneously functioning in both. Another article in the Chronicle, "Job-Market Blues,"[3] cites examples of frustrated new Phd's taking part-time appointments to keep active in their fields or to supplement their incomes. The author points out that "For more and more budding academics, part-time work, one-year appointments, and postdoctoral positions have become the norm."

So we're talking about an even bigger group of reserve labor: part-timers, TAs, post-docs and other temporary full-time appointments. This, in fact, really reflects a whole trend in the national workforce -- the use of contingent labor. Part-time and temporary employment threatens to undermine what little security American employees have earned and learned to enjoy.

The largest private employer in the U.S. today is Manpower, Inc., a temporary employment agency. This is also true in many metropolitan areas. In Baltimore, S.E.S. Temps Inc. is second only to Johns Hopkins University in number of employees and when I mentioned this recently in a talk I gave in Washington D.C., I promptly received an enormously detailed and revealing letter from a temporary faculty member at Johns Hopkins who happened to

be in the audience. The writer, with temporary experience at Johns Hopkins and as a Kelly Girl, explained that the University scrupulously avoided using "adjuncts" for fear of lowering the institution's image in the public's view, ironically favoring graduate students instead.

In the general economy, temporary employees, or "assignment employees" as they are now sometimes called (disposable employees would be more like it), are responsible for most of whatever economic recovery we have felt. According to the National Association of Temporary Services (NATS), temp employment increased 17% in 1992. [4] Part-time and temporary employees are generally excluded from unions and are extremely difficult to organize. In fact, one of the attractions of hiring part-time employees besides cost savings and flexibility is their likelihood to remain unorganized. A recent study [5] suggests that government policy may actually make it more difficult for part-timers to form unions and protect their interests. The only Congressional attempt to address the situation of part-timers that I know of, Pat Schroeder's "Part-Time and Temporary Worker Protection Act," never got out of committee. The temporary industry's association, the NATS, however, is moving right along lobbying for restrictive unemployment insurance legislation that would limit temporary employees' ability to receive benefits. As usual, employers are well-organized.

In academia, where the workforce is already so hierarchial, we especially need to be organized if protection of employees and preservation of quality higher education are realistic goals.

Unity of interest will be key in countering the stratification of faculty that has proven so useful to administrations in a "divide and conquer" strategy. Full-time faculty are not always sympathetic to the problems of part-time faculty. You may see us as lacking expertise, as a way to lower your workload, or as a threat to your own position, but the real challenge is to try to see your self-interest in improving our situations. As a reserve labor force in higher education, our existence gradually erodes the ranks of full-time faculty -- we're a cheap labor alternative. As this happens, tenure, academic freedom, and faculty governance become more and more restricted. To turn this around, the economic incentive must be curtailed by limiting part-timers and paying them well. This applies to TAs, post-docs, and temporary full-timers as well. We all need to come together around our common interests.

Just to underscore the impending danger to <u>all</u> faculty in the current trends of outsourcing, subcontracting, and temporary employment, I would like to call your attention to a article in a recent Bulletin of the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE.) Ironically titled "Upside-Down Thinking," [6]this interview with Charles Handy warns us of things to come. Handy, a business consultant and visiting professor at the London Business School, observes that long-term jobs with security are no longer being created but rather that short-term, part-time jobs are emerging. He suggests that "we really have to rethink what we mean by 'work...'" He comes up with a spine-chilling organizational proposal for higher education institutions that he calls the "shamrock."

The three leaves of the shamrock represent three kinds of workforces. Only the "professional core" is actually employed full-time; they are the "educational designers and the educational managers" -- in other words administrators. The second leaf, the "contractual organizations, the subcontractors" is where the faculty come in. Handy explains "the experts, if we can call the faculty that, are almost in the wings, really." (he's not talking part-time now) He sees tenure being restricted to "maybe twenty or twenty-five years, and then faculty being expected to live portfolio lives ... employed when they're needed." (how's that for marginalizing?) The shamrock's third leaf is the "independents," or "hired help," as Handy says. These are the "temporary, part-time, semi-skilled workers helping out at peak times." (sound familiar?) There's lots of other interesting suggestions from Handy, like eliminating faculty offices as expensive "filing cabinets" in favor of shared space he calls "the working club." If Handy's line is followed, we can do away with the faculty altogether and create a very different kind of education.

On the lighter side, I heard another metaphor used to describe faculty at last week's conference: the doughnut. The image was supposed to be one of a margin of part-timers surrounding the center of full-time faculty, but I got a kick out of pointing out that once you eat the periphery, there's really nothing left. This could be our situation in academia very soon: once enormous numbers of part-time and temporary faculty are vulnerably in place at extremely substandard salaries; full-time

faculty may find themselves losing the protections they have always taken for granted. Again, I'd like to emphasize the impact on tenure, academic freedom, and faculty governance.

The practical way to prevent this is by pricing part-time and temporary faculty out of the market. They must become too expensive to function as a substitute labor force. So faculty must get organized, both full-time and part-time alike. A useful tool is the AAUP's National Report on the Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty[7] which includes specific recommendations helpful in formal or informal negotiations. We need to go beyond our own narrow organizations, however, by forming institution-wide coalitions between faculty, students, and staff, and by building national networks to share strategies and success. We are doing some of that right here. In New Jersey, we have a coalition of unions and students groups from across the state, Challenge 2000, that lobbies the legislature to restore funding to higher education.

But is this enough? We can organize for collective bargaining, we can create alliances and develop networks, but clearly we cannot achieve reforms in the academic labor market without finding funds to finance these reforms. We have to hurdle the final barrier: funding higher education in the face of chronic fiscal crises.

Therefore, I'd like to close this talk by suggesting that the unity we create among all faculty will not only be necessary in reforming the university, but necessary also in defending the university from cutbacks and retrenchment. I am no expert on fiscal policy, but I know the fiscal crisis of higher education

is part of a much larger economic and political problem, just as the situation with part-time faculty is part of a larger problem running throughout our nation's workforce. All of our organizations and associations need to focus on this.

We can take a few steps to begin this work. 1) First, we must recognize that the financing of higher education, and education in general, is on a shaky foundation, relying on a patchwork of taxes vulnerable to revolt. We need a movement for progressive tax reform that rationalizes the tax structure. 2) Second, we need to understand that there is an active conservative and right-wing movement that seeks to disinvest in the public sector, that seeks to reduce commitment to social needs and public services. Education is a particular target of this movement. In other words, education not only desperately needs funding, it is also currently under attack. 3) Finally, in order to really build the kind of public support necessary to address these questions, the workforce of higher education has to reach out and make broader alliances. This means a unified faculty, together with other university employees and students, taking up these issues to defend the public interest.

Obviously we have a lot on our plate, from specific benefits for part-timers and TAs all the way to the future of higher education, but this conference will help us find a way to begin.

(1) Michelle M. Tokarczyk. "Getting the Job: The Adjunct Game." Concerns (Winter 1994) Vol. 24 No. 1, pp. 24-32.

(2) Cary Nelson and Michael Berube. "Graduate Education Is Losing Its Moral Base." The Chronicle of Higher Education. March 23, 1994, pp. B1-3.

(3) Denise K. Magner. "Job-Market Blues." The Chronicle of Higher Education. April 27, 1994, pp. A17-20.

(4) Christopher Cook. "Temps -- The Forgotten Workers." The Nation. January 21, 1994, pp. 125-8.

(5) Ronald G. Ehrenberg, Pamela Rosenberg, and Jeanne Li. "Part-time Employment in the United States," in Employment Unemployment and Labor Utilization, Robert A. Hart, ed. Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988, 268-9.

(6) Russell Edgerton. "Upside-Down Thinking: A Conversation with Charles Handy." American Association of Higher Education Bulletin (September 1993.)

(7) Committee G's "Report On the Status of Non-Tenure-Track Faculty." Academe. July - August 1993, pp. 39-46.